

MEDIA AND MEMORY:

TECH EXHAUSTION OF A GENERATION

A RESPONSE TO AN INTERVIEW WITH L.M. SACASAS
ON CHANGING THE WAY WE LOOK AT TECHNOLOGY



A RESPONSE TO AN INTERVIEW WITH L.M. SACASAS
ON CHANGING THE WAY WE LOOK AT TECHNOLOGY
BY NATALIE FARAHANI

"YOU BEGIN with the example of a hammer. Now, a hammer can be used, you say, to build a home. It can be used to bash in a skull. A lot of thinking about ethics or technology traditionally — a little less so now — often involved the question of, what am I going to do with this tool? So hence, the example of the hammer. In this view, the tool is ostensibly neutral.

And I think that's the idea that I find myself pushing back against a good bit. So in one sense, it makes a certain amount of sense that, yeah, I can do good things with this tool, this hammer. I can use it to build a house or repair something, or I can use it to hit somebody. And in that sense, what matters is my intention and the use to which I put it.

So I want to push back on not the fact that that's untrue, but that it's inadequate as a way of thinking about how technology impinges on the moral life or what we think of as ethics. And so the example that I give there with the hammer has to do with perception. So one of the key ways in which I think technologies fail to be neutral is that they shape how we perceive the world, and they dispose us in a certain way towards the world."

- L.M. Sacasas, in an interview with Ezra Klein

"TO THE PERSON WITH A
HAMMER
EVERYTHING LOOKS LIKE A
NAIL."

While perhaps a trite example,
it works.



ham · mer

/'hamər/

noun

a tool with a heavy metal head mounted at right angles at the end of a handle, used for jobs such as breaking things and driving in nails.

Similar: Mallet, gavel, beetle

Another (better) example.



smart · phone

/'smärt ,fōn/

noun

A mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touchscreen interface, internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications.

Carried by many of us all the time, the device kind of re-frames aspects of experience as memories to be recorded.

With the reframing **(LITERALLY AND
FIGURATIVELY)**
through the smartphone,
we might feel differently
about experiences, see
them differently, without
the camera in hand. But
now that it's there, even
if we choose not to take
the picture, for a moment,
it has changed how we in-
terpret what is happening
or what is going on. A lot
of this is not about say-
ing it's good or bad.
Very often, people just
want to know—

IS THIS A THING?

Looking at how the children of the established media generations see their phones, Sacasas might be wrong.



And so enters,

*Does not always "flip", but
"pre-touchscreen cellphone" doesn't sound as good.




The flip* phone!

The Modern Youth's Newest Old Companion!



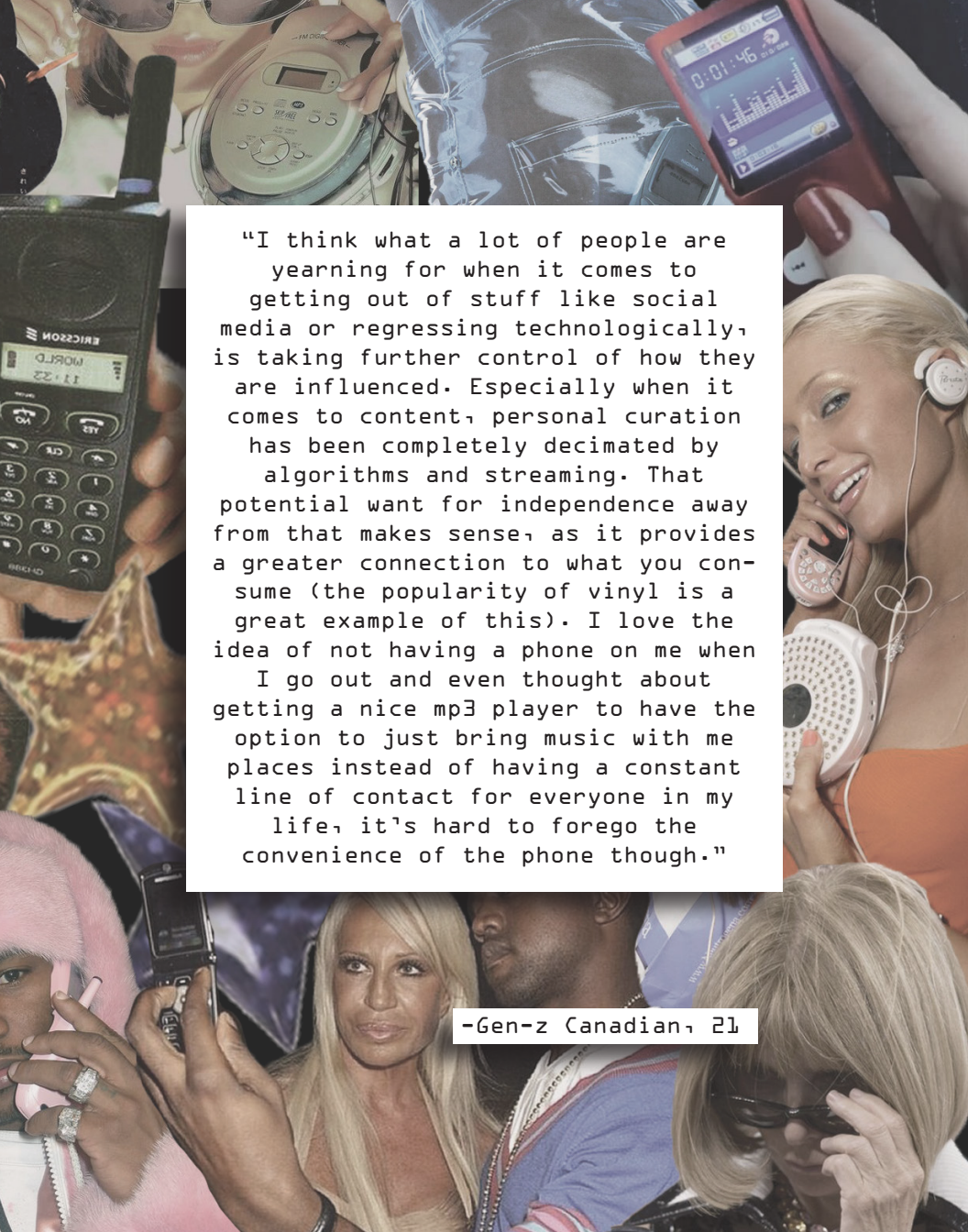
Texts, phone calls, a camera (depending on your choice in device), and endless customization and personality from the phone itself to stickers and other embellishments, the flip phone seems to be widely regarded as an indulgence in simpler things. A more quiet life, just a couple of necessities and more moments to remember. No matter how big or small.

If the black
box is the
issue, a step
back to the
mini-brick
would solve
our issues
entirely,
wouldn't it?



"I think for aesthetic purposes, I fucking love flip phones. Like I remember vividly the novelty of having flip phones and how cute they can be accessorised, there is a whole attitude with a flip phone that current phones just don't have. It's in the motion. The flick up and she's open. There's like a satisfaction in that I feel passionately about. The flip phone is the epitome of the sassy chic hot girl, it needs to come back. For practical purposes, it's very simple. Call, text and that's it. I think if I were to somehow go non-social media mode I would get a flip phone. I want one so bad but I love my Instagram too much."

-Gen-z American, 21



"I think what a lot of people are yearning for when it comes to getting out of stuff like social media or regressing technologically, is taking further control of how they are influenced. Especially when it comes to content, personal curation has been completely decimated by algorithms and streaming. That potential want for independence away from that makes sense, as it provides a greater connection to what you consume (the popularity of vinyl is a great example of this). I love the idea of not having a phone on me when I go out and even thought about getting a nice mp3 player to have the option to just bring music with me places instead of having a constant line of contact for everyone in my life, it's hard to forego the convenience of the phone though."

-Gen-z Canadian, 21

EZRA KLEIN: So I want to begin with a technological experience many of us have

haven't hidden self view, we have a tendency just to look at ourselves in these set-

had over is tall so much talkin even the phone?

While forced to navigate this world, why not indulge in some of the fun of the tech advancements we have seen? Is

MICHAEL: I know, understand, and want both the pros and cons of our smartphones? Is it possible to combine the conveniences of today with the fun of the past to create a landscape where we aren't all inescapable of spewing doomerism through the lens of technology destroying society?

it possible to know, understand, and want both the pros and cons of our smartphones? Is it possible to combine the conveniences of today with the fun of the past to create a landscape where we aren't all inescapable of spewing doomerism through the lens of technology destroying society?

There use our ate me or ges again, sense And so

there are a number of things that sort of distract us from that. For one thing, if we

EZRA KLEIN: One thing I loved about the piece is, you gave me language for something I

was feeling, and then gave me
courage to stop Zooming with
people early in the pandemic,

MICHAEL SACASAS: So I've
picked up bits and pieces
from a variety of philoso-

TECHNOLOGY

when it enhances our lives?

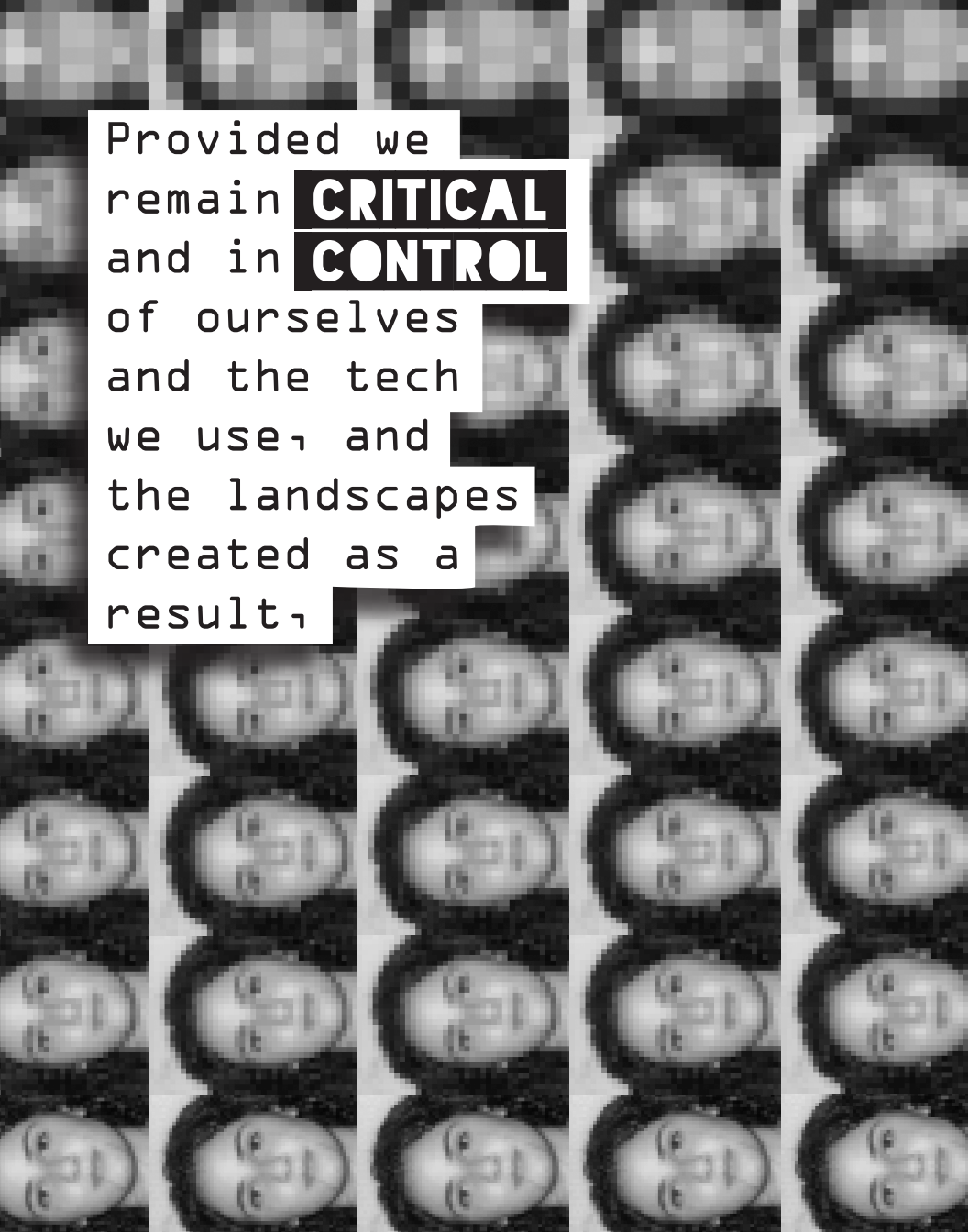
Is it
possible to

TAKE JOY IN

big, and it's laced through
your work. So I was wondering
if you could talk a bit about

of technology. And I think
it's always useful to ask
that question: how is this

Provided we
remain **CRITICAL**
and in **CONTROL**
of ourselves
and the tech
we use, and
the landscapes
created as a
result,



to me that answer is yes.





"So one of the key ways in which I think technologies fail to be neutral is that they shape how we perceive the world, and they dispose us in a certain way towards the world." Sacasas says, and they indeed dispose of us in a certain way. Ads are neverending and inserted into every corner of what we see inside and out of

the black
the pres-
document
t h i n g
lives for
of others
vasive,
it light-
the sense
they give
unlim-
a c -



b o x ,
sure to
every-
in our
the eyes
is per-
to put
ly. in
that,
us such
ited
c e s s

to people and content. Contrary to the thoughts of Sacasas, though, I would argue that it's not necessarily the black box that's the issue, but rather access. Our access to the web and those within it, and the access that others (people and corporations alike) have to us.

The device is indeed
neutral. The access,
and the culture within
that access, is not.

References

Hertz, Garnet. Art + DIY Electronics. The MIT Press, 2023.

"Transcript: Ezra Klein Interviews L.M. Sacasas." The New York Times, The New York Times, 3 Aug. 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/08/03/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-lm-sacasas.html.

